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## XVI.—VONDEL'S VALUE AS A TRAGIC POET.

Joost van den Vondel is one of the few Dutch poets who have attained to anything approaching international fame. To him is attributed a rather noteworthy influence on Milton. As long ago as 1854 A. Fischel demonstrated in his *Life and writings of Joost van den Vondel* that Milton knew and made use of Vondel's works. Gosse, in his *Studies in the Literatures of Northern Europe*, pointed out that this influence came only from Vondel's *Lucifer* and was restricted to the sixth book of *Paradise Lost*. Edmunson, however, in his *Milton and Vondel: A Curiosity of Literature* (London, 1885), showed that not only in Books 1, 2, 4, and 9 of *Paradise Lost*, but also in *Paradise Regained* and in *Samson Agonistes* fragments are imitated from *Joannes den Boetgezant* (John the Messenger of Repentance), *Adam in Ballingschap* (Adam in Exile), *Samson of the Heilige Wraak* (Samson or the Sacred Vengeance), and from *Bespiegelingen van God en Godsdiens*t (Reflections about God and Religion). Among the other discussions the most important are that of Masson in his *Life of Milton*, that of Professor Moltzer in *Noord en Zuid* (vol. 9), and that of Van Noppen in the introduction to his translation of Vondel's *Lucifer*.

It seems that the finality of the results of these discussions is still open to question. It is certainly possible for a partisan of Vondel's influence to give to the translation of *Lucifer* a Miltonic flavor. It is equally possible for the opposition to point out that the ideas alleged to have been adopted by Milton were common property. And when it comes to evidence of the actual identity of figures used, there is always the unanswerable objection of a common source, which in this case is the Bible.

There is one detail in the study of Vondel's influence which seems to have been overlooked, and the discussion of it may have a general interest. It is this: Since Vondel's influence not only on Milton, but also on such Dutch poets as Anslo, Brandt, Oudaan, Vollenhove, and Antonides van der Goes, emanates almost exclusively from his tragedies, why is it that this influence is not dramatic, as one would expect, but both epical and lyrical?

Vondel considered himself specially born and adapted for tragedy. From his first biographer, Brandt, down to contemporary critics such as Professors Moltzer and Beets, Alberdink Thym, Van Lennep who has given the best edition of the poet's works, and by students of Germanic literatures generally, he has been considered a great tragic poet, nay, he has been held comparable to Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, and even Shakespeare. Dr. Jonckbloet, the Romance philologist, raised a storm of indignant protest when he dared doubt the excellence of Vondel's tragedies. But for this one dissenting voice his reputation as a tragic poet seems still to be firmly established.

Out of Vondel's thirty-two dramas twenty-three are original, eight are translated from the Greek or the Latin, and one is a pastoral drama, moulded more or less upon the form of Tasso's *Aminta* and Guarini's *Pastor Fido*.

In 1612, in his twenty-fourth year, he wrote his first play: *Easter, or the delivery of Israel out of Egypt; Tragi-Comedy presented on the stage for the edification of every one*. It was given under the auspices of the Brabant Rhetoricians' Guild at Amsterdam. The plot is as follows: Moses is herding sheep on Mount Horeb. In a soliloquy he depicts his taste for the shepherd's life, spent as it is among scenes of nature. He avoids the entanglements of the world, partly, it is true, on account of his having slain an Egyptian, but mainly because of his heart's desire. O, could he but deliver

Jacob's house from bondage! The care of his flock has trained him to be the leader of his people. Jehovah himself appears and consecrates him an "earthly god." After this, Moses girds his loins and goes out to encourage the heads of Israel. Then, having in vain demanded in the name of Jehovah Israel's freedom, he forces Pharaoh by means of his miracles to consent to the departure of the Jews. Only the miracle of the staff changing into a snake takes place on the stage. The other miracles and the plagues are described by the chorus, which points them out, besides, on painted stage pictures. Pharaoh repents and hurries with his army after the departing Israelites. Then "Fame" in a lengthy oration, which takes up the greater part of the fifth act, tells about the interesting occurrence in the Red Sea, after which the chorus sings a hymn of praise. Moses offers a sacrifice of thanks, and the play would be over, if it were not for another and, this time, a moralizing chant by the chorus, which finally does end it. This chant or chorus gives the mystical explanation of the play, which symbolizes the delivery of mankind through Christ from the sway of darkness and sin. And Vondel hints later that he also wished to suggest the delivery of Holland from the dominion of Spain.

That it was Vondel's object to edify his audience with this play appears from the following passage taken from the preface. He wishes "that the play be read (sic!) with such fruits that it may lead to the praise of the holy and blessed name of God, and that the reflecting upon it may cause the sad tragedy of our miserable lives to take a happy and wished for end. Amen."

It is evident that we are here within ear-shot of the mediæval miracle play, and I hasten to say that Vondel soon abandoned this primitive dramatic form. But weak though it be in dramatic conception and little as it represents

the poet, *Easter* is nevertheless important as a resultant of forces which characterize his time, which help to explain his work, and from which he has scarcely ever shown himself wholly independent.

As has been pointed out, the play was given under the auspices of a guild of Rhetoricians. In these guilds, of which there were a great many, the literary activity of the nation had for a long time been centered. Early ecclesiastical influence, then a strong tide of theological protestantism, and certain national traits, account for the fact that the literary output of these guilds was in the main solemn and edifying. Now, Vondel being a member of the two most influential guilds, wrote under the impulse of a deep-seated and prevalent tradition. This tradition of edification through the drama is almost wholly responsible for the following interesting fact. When with the advent of the renaissance the writing of tragedies became the vogue, the development of farce and comedy, which had already given rich promise and to which the people, with their tendency toward the concrete and their quick perception of contrast, were peculiarly responsive, was for the time being arrested. Tragedy assumed the role of comedy, viz. that of commenting upon and criticizing society, church, and state. It is true that Vondel is superior to all other Dutch poets of his time in power of expression, but in thought and activity he remains essentially its representative. As a result, he never rids himself wholly of the fatal propensity to edify. He goes even further. In the measure as he develops, he exchanges edification for argumentation and finally persists in using tragedy as a vehicle for propaganda and polemics.

This naively avowed purpose of edification in *Easter* is not its only characteristic. The renaissance is suggested by the choruses between the acts, by the substitution of learned

for natural expression, by the frequency of oratory, by the nature of the verse form.

The movement may be said to have begun in 1584, with the publication by the so-called Old Guild of a book to which *Spiegel*, the "Father of the language," was the main contributor, printed in Leyden by Christoffel Plantyn. It was without a doubt suggested by Du Bellay's *Deffense et Illustration de la langue françoise*, and had the same object. Before Vondel began to write, the triumph and prevalence of the renaissance was already an accomplished fact, and the romantic drama had during the poet's time no chance of success with play writers. There is more. Vondel was a *bourgeois*: his father sold stockings for a living, and the son succeeded him in the business. This in itself would argue nothing, were it not for the fact that caste in his time and nation was sharply outlined and that Vondel remained ever aware of the boundaries, spiritual and physical, of his social position. Now, the principal representatives of the renaissance were men of rank and station. Their leader, the poet and historian Hooft, was an aristocrat of great power and influence, a Mæcenas, and his castle a *rendezvous* of all the literary talent of the country. It was through his influence that Vondel began to learn Latin and Greek after he was twenty-five, and that he was initiated into the spirit of the renaissance. As a result, the poet did not, as Corneille and Racine, look upon the movement with complete self-identification and spontaneity. He was led to accentuate the faults of the renaissance. After learning by heart the Aristotelian rules, he applied them artificially and from without, not naturally and from within. And though his works represent on the whole the most beautiful expression of the renaissance in Holland, its tone is too far above the popular tone. It cannot be denied—and the accompanying table will prove it—that there was an abyss between his tragedies and the people.

LIST OF VONDEL'S PLAYS.	Published in :	First Presented in Amsterdam Theater in : <sup>1</sup>	Number of Times Presented in Amsterdam Theater from its Opening to the Year of Vondel's Death. <sup>1</sup> (1638-1679)
1. Easter .....	1612		0
2. Jerusalem Destroyed.....	1620		0
3. Palamedes.....	1625	1665	3
4. Amsterdam Hecuba (Tr.: Seneca's Troades) .....	"		0
5. Hippolytus (Tr.: Seneca).....	1628		0
6. Sofompancas or Joseph at Court (Tr.: Hugo Grotius).....	1635	1638	64
7. Gysbreght van Amstel.....	1637	"	119
8. Electra (Tr.: Sophocles).....	1639	1639	32
9. The Virgins.....	"	1660	5
10. The Brothers.....	1640	1641	46
11. Joseph in Dothan.....	"	1640	44
12. Joseph in Egypt.....	"	"	40
13. Peter and Paul.....	1641		0
14. Mary Stuart or Martyred Majesty.....	1646		0
15. Descendants of the Lion (Pastoral Drama)	1647	—	—
16. Solomon .....	1648	1650	29
17. Lucifer.....	1654	1655	2
18. Salmoneus.....	1656	1657	7
19. Jephthah.....	1659	1659	11
20. David in Exile.....	1660	1660	5
21. David Restored.....	"	1661	5
22. Oedipus (Tr.: Sophocles).....	"	1665	3
23. Samson or the Sacred Vengeance.....	"	1660	3
24. Adonijah or Disastrous Crown Desire....	1661		0
25. Batavian Brothers.....	1662	1663	3
26. Phaethon or Reckless Temerity.....	1663		0
27. Adam in Exile or the Tragedy of Tragedies).....	1664		0
28. Zungchin or the Wreck of Chinese Rule..	1666		0
29. Iphigenia in Tauris (Tr.: Euripides)....	"		0
30. Noah or The Destruction of the First World .....	1667		0
31. The Phenician (Tr.: Euripides).....	1668		0
32. Hercules at Trachis (Tr.: Sophocles)....	"		0

If we except his most popular tragedy, *Gysbreght van Amstel*, which was during his lifetime presented on the stage

<sup>1</sup> Data taken from C. N. Wybrands' *Dietsche Warande*, vol. 10, page 423.

of the Amsterdam Theater one hundred and nineteen times, but owes its popularity rather to historical than to dramatic interest, the average number of performances for each of his original tragedies, from the opening of the theater in 1638 to Vondel's death in 1679, is only nine. Five out of these twenty-two original tragedies can be said to have achieved some degree of popularity, the number of their presentations under the circumstances just given ranging from eleven to forty-six. Eight of them were given from two to seven times, and nine were not given at all. Besides, Vondel's plays did not usually command full houses. That the renaissance itself was not to blame for this unsatisfactory result is evident from the fact that Vondel's translation of *Electra* was given thirty-two times and his translation, from the Latin of Hugo Grotius, of *Sofompaneas*, sixty-four times.

Vondel's contemporary and biographer, Brandt, lays this lack of success to the door of the storming dominies who, especially after the poet became a member of the Catholic Church in 1639, raved against the stage, against Vondel and his habit of dramatizing biblical subjects. Vondel himself charges Jan Vos, the director of the Theater and himself a successful dramatist, with having given the rôles of his plays to incompetent actors who, moreover, "came upon the stage in absurd and threadbare costumes." Again, some well-meaning admirers of the poet have discovered that the cause lay in the apparent lack of taste and culture in the public.

As for the first charge, it may be suggested that play-goers have never been recruited from the orthodox renters of pews in protestant churches. And one would think, since human nature does not seem to be subject to evolution, that the sermons of these storming dominies must have been fairly good advertisements. Vondel's own charge has been thoroughly



refuted by Jonckbloet.<sup>1</sup> As for taste and culture, the public has always been known to lack them in the case of certain unsuccessful plays.

If from an analysis of the characteristics which came to Vondel's tragedies from without, through the influence of the time and place in which he lived, we turn to those which came from within, through the nature and quality of his genius and character, our inquiry will naturally concern itself at once with Vondel's own conception of the dramatic principle as applied to tragedy. The results of this inquiry can be stated only in terms of comparison with a universally recognized and adopted formula for the constitution of tragedy, as exemplified in those tragedies which all the world agrees in calling excellent. To that end we must leave out of consideration those conventional and temporary formulæ,—such as the unities of time and place, the five act theory, etc., which had weight and currency in Vondel's day,—and remember that both the so-called romantic and the renaissance tragedy were dead by the end of the seventeenth century, making room for a developed comedy and the modern drama.

In an age when authoritative precept had such weight that even the greatest dramatic geniuses were forced to submit to it, it is to be expected that Vondel, in the development and application of his own dramatic conception, was guided by some dramatic gospel. Aristotle first came to him in the form of a sort of handbook for the tragic poet, a paraphrasing of that philosopher's *Poetics*, which was entitled *Dan. Heinsii de Tragœdiæ Constitutione Liber* and published by the Elzeviers in 1616. There is an abundance of evidence to the effect that Vondel looked upon Heinsius as his main authority, and if we can cull from his

<sup>1</sup>See Jonckbloet's *History of Dutch Literature*, vol. 4, page 322.

book a statement of the tragic principle which is accepted to-day, it will be perfectly fair to base an estimate of Vondel's value as a dramatic poet upon a comparison of his tragedies with this statement. Dr. Jonckbloet made such a one, and it is in part his statement which I herewith present.

Very properly the greatest emphasis is laid upon action : "that is the soul of tragedy." This action must be homogeneous and converge toward one point, the final catastrophe. It becomes tragical through the unexpected, but causally consequential, reversal of the fate of the principal character or characters, who are in general of higher station, possessed of greater power or deeper passion than the average spectator. This reversal of fate should, in order to create unexpectedness and, therefore, interest, be brought about by one who is related to the principal character by ties of blood or friendship. Since man is inclined to fear lest what he sees happen to others may happen to him, the action in general and the reversal of fate in particular must cause in the spectator those emotions which it is the object of tragedy to call forth, such as pity and fear. These emotions must, moreover, be called forth "purified," *i. e.*, free from the grief and deep confusion which real events would cause in him, and based on æsthetic feeling. Besides, not every personality is most fit to arouse them ; fittest is that personality who, like the spectator, is neither extremely virtuous and perfect, nor extremely wicked.

This brings Heinsius to the discussion of the characters and their characterization, upon which he lays the second emphasis. He starts from the principle that the weal or woe of man depends on his acts. The tragic poet must, therefore, set forth his characters not necessarily according to historical reality, but in accordance with the requirements of the action. They must have the proper "mores" and

the necessary passions. With "mores" Heinsius means all that distinguishes one man from another, all that constitutes his individuality. This individuality must be marked, and either kept intact or developed consistently throughout the play.

In the third place Heinsius speaks of the bond that must exist between the action and the characters. There is no doubt that there are situations which are strikingly tragic. If a poet is attracted by such a situation with a view of preparing it for the stage, he can do so fruitfully only if he makes the reversal of fate dependent upon the character of the personage or personages who are the center of the action, for thus alone can the spectator become reconciled to the final catastrophe. If the poet does not do this, even the most tragical situation will be lost on the spectator, and experience shows that many an excellent subject has been in this way robbed of all its force and flavor by an unfit dramatist.

If we accept this statement as being suggestive of the essential spirit and, therefore, form of tragedy, it is rather interesting to note parenthetically that we have here to do with three principles, to wit: harmony in the action, harmony in the characterization, and harmony in the several relations between the characters and the action; and that these three harmonies correspond to the conventional three unities. Aristotle's famous dictum that "tragedy tries *in general* to limit itself to one turn of the sun or not to exceed it too much," but that "the epic is not limited in regard to time" is based upon what he had observed in the twenty or so successful tragedies which he may have analysed, and is intended at most by way of suggestion and advice.<sup>1</sup> These Greek tragedies are themselves so limited only "in general,"

<sup>1</sup> See Jules Lemaitre : *Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote*.

and the idea is simply that a historical character once selected for a tragical situation being in the course of time often subject to change, the time chosen for the action must not be extended so that it would include an inconsistent change in that character's individuality. The twenty-four hours limit,—which, indeed, is not always adhered to in the seventeenth century tragedy,—became but a conventional formula. But the condition on which it is based is real and essential. As for the unity of place, of which Aristotle does not speak, it may be partly due to the paucity of scenic possibilities of the seventeenth century stage, but since one's point of view towards a situation is always changed by a change of locality, it stands to reason that any dramatist, if he wishes, as he ought, to retain harmony in the relations between the characters and the action, will change the locality of it only when such change does not affect the bearing of the characters upon the action. In general he must, and does, avoid the change.

Vondel's attitude towards the essentials as well as the merely conventional formulæ of tragedy is one of faith and docility. He neither quarrels with his tools nor doubts the trustworthiness of authority and example. Like Corneille, he stands at the beginning of a movement: he is not paralyzed by the critical theories of a transition period. The road is clear. How far will his own dramatic genius lead him?

In *Jerusalem Destroyed* there is practically a total absence of action. There is only narrative, and tedious narrative at that. The scenes are scarcely connected. At the end the angel Raphael preaches a sermon, 288 lines long, in which he explains to the Christian pilgrims assembled what may be thought of Israel's fall. The play has still less dramatic quality than *Easter*.

Everyone knows what religious and political troubles were caused by Jansenism. The question of predestination or no predestination split Holland into two hostile camps. Children left their parents, preachers stormed and denounced: there was a reign of terror. The Stadtholder, Prince Maurice, took a hand in the fight, and the matter ended in 1619 with the murder on the scaffold of Holland's great chancellor, the count of Oldenbarnevelt. Vondel was on the side of the latter, and wrote his *Palamedes* against Prince Maurice. The basis of this tragedy is, therefore, political polemics. The author was summoned to appear before a court in The Hague, and if the government of Amsterdam had not refused extradition, the play would have cost him his head.

The plot contains the story of Palamedes' (Oldenbarnevelt's) death through the machinations of Ulysses. Agamemnon, who convenes a court to judge Palamedes' alleged treason and allows it to be packed with enemies of the accused, is Prince Maurice. A key to the *dramatis personæ* was published by Brandt.

Here is some improvement, for there is a connected story. But Palamedes takes no active part in what little action there is, and the deeds of his opponents are not brought about even by his attitude towards them. We cannot discover what Palamedes has done to cause all this hatred of Ulysses. There is no characterization through action. The fearful nature of Ulysses' vengeance is not justified by anything whatsoever. Palamedes tells a great deal of good about himself, and his friends tell a great deal more. Here we have a venerable old man, whom description makes us suppose to be spotless, who is unnecessarily murdered by ecclesiastical spite and worldly wickedness: lying and deceit triumph in the end. There is no question of punishment for the miscreants. The play is over with the fourth act;

the fifth is taken up with oratory and narration by persons who have no connection with the plot.

Van Lennep, the novelist, calls this play a masterpiece, and points out the wealth of picturesque descriptions, the life in the dialogue, the richness and variety of imagery, the power and the elegance of expression. This is like praising a useless egg-beater, because its material happens to be silver, curiously and beautifully chased and set with pearls.

One would expect Vondel's next original tragedy to be a good one (see Table). The Amsterdam Theater, the establishment of which in 1637 marks the unification and the end of all the local guilds of rhetoricians, was solemnly opened with *Gysbreght van Amstel*, January 3, 1638. It has kept its place there, being still given every New Year's eve. Its relative popularity can, however, be amply explained on grounds of local patriotism. Its plot is taken from the early history of the city.

Floris the Fifth, count of Holland, was a sort of Louis the Eleventh. He destroyed the power of the country's feudatories in an effort to centralize the government. A conspiracy followed, and he was murdered for his pains in 1496. The play represents the resistance of Gysbreght, lord of Amstel or Amsterdam, his part in the conspiracy, the taking of his city by Floris, and the consequent loss of his all.

Vondel has with this tragedy given an imitation of the second book of Vergil's *Æneid*. It has been asserted in all seriousness that the play must be good, because it is an imitation of an excellent epic. The result, however, is that it is a mere series of epical fragments. Narration again takes the place of action. What characterization there is, is again accomplished by description. There is, indeed, reversal of fate, but it has not been made dependent on the

character of the hero, who is again presented as spotlessly white, innocent, pure, brave, and a good provider for his town and family. Floris does not seem at all like the hand of an all-ruling Providence, but rather like a bold, bad spellbreaker.

There is one sporadic, but well developed dramatic scene in the play. When Gysbreght decides to fall fighting among the ruins of his city, and wishes his family to leave it for a place of safety, his lovable wife, Badeloch, refuses. We have here what constitutes the basis of all dramatic action: a clash of the will and the emotions. Through this clash and the subsequent action Badeloch develops into a heroine. It is a pity that this situation is but secondary to the main plot. As it stands, it does not redeem the shortcomings of the whole.

*The Virgins* represents the massacre by the king of the Huns, Attila, of St. Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins, near Cologne, Vondel's birthplace. As he had glorified the city of his home in *Gysbreght van Amstel*, so did he intend to compliment the city of his birth with *The Virgins*. The play shows still greater faults of construction than *Gysbreght van Amstel*, which it resembles in general tone.

*The Brothers* is a *Tendenz*-play in which are suggested the terrible results of the intolerance of contemporary preachers. The plot is based upon 2 Samuel 21, verses 1-14, in which we may read how David sacrifices seven of Saul's sons at the behest of the Gibeonites whom Saul had persecuted. *The Brothers* is the first of Vondel's tragedies in which there is consecutive action. It also excites fear and pity. But neither the action nor the pity and fear are tragical. The action would have been tragical, if Saul had been made the soul and pivot of the action and represented as the victim of a one-sided passion which leads him inevitably into the crime of persecuting the Gibeonites, a crime for

which the sacrifice of his sons atones,—king David to be simply the arm of an inexorable Providence in the execution of vengeance. As the action stands, however, Saul does not appear, and the sacrifice of his sons is mere murder, brought about by the machinations of a high-priest, Abjathar, who happens to hate them. David is represented as a priest-ridden, characterless king, who covers an underhanded ambition under the cloak of religion, and aids Abjathar for fear of losing his crown. All the glory falls upon the seven sons of Saul and their two mothers. Our pity and fear are for them, and these emotions are akin to what we should feel if we saw a man thrown from a high roof in a brawl. The fear and pity are resolved into a feeling of disgust, revolt, and injustice, not (as they should be in tragedy) eased by a feeling of resignation.

Vondel says of his *Joseph in Dothan* that it might make a pleasing impression in the acting or the *reading*. It is in fact but a narration in dialogue, a dramatic poem. It has been given abundant praise as such. It should be pointed out, however, that a dramatic poem is always weak as a work of art. Such a poem is like an automobile drawn by a horse: neither the drama nor the poem comes into its own, and there is incongruity besides. The drama is confessedly weak and the poem is confessedly not a well rounded whole in and for itself. The combination of the two is incongruous, because both have requirements and qualities of their own, which refuse to mix.

In *Joseph in Egypt* we have an imitation of Seneca's *Hippolytus*, which Vondel had translated in 1628. He thinks he has improved upon Seneca, because he emphasizes, more than Seneca, the dire results of unholy love.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that he has repeated the mistake, made in *The*

<sup>1</sup> See Van Lennep's edition of Vondel's works, vol. 3, page 803.



*Brothers*, of misplacing the tragical situation, which he almost always finds in the misfortunes of the more or less passive victim of the action, not in the causes which must lead to them. Racine calls his own imitation of *Hippolytus* by the name of *Phèdre*, and rightly so, because the tragical situation lies in her being led through her character to burn with unholy love for her stepson, whose death she causes, by means of a false accusation, when he withstands her. This death awakens her conscience and is atoned for by her suicide. Vondel calls his imitation *Joseph in Egypt* because he does not see that the passion of Potiphar's wife contains the tragical situation, but thinks that it lies in Joseph's suffering and imprisonment. When Joseph is punished through her false accusation, she calmly continues in her ways and starts new love affairs. Vice triumphs again: there is no atonement.

*Peter and Paul* and *Mary Stuart*, which were never presented on the stage, both sing the praises of the Roman Catholic Church. As tragedies they are weaker than most of Vondel's work and may, therefore, be left without further discussion.

The middle of the century is, however, the poet's best period. The *Descendants of the Lion*,—written in honor of the peace of Münster, which made an end, so glorious for Holland, of the Eighty Years' War with Spain,—is a good pastoral drama. Not only in this, but also in *Solomon* and in *Lucifer*, he rises to the greatness of a true poet and, with some reservations, to that of a dramatic poet. *Solomon* is undoubtedly his best tragedy. For once the tragical situation is placed where it belongs.

Solomon, made proud by prosperity, conceives a fateful passion for king Hiram's daughter, here called Sidonia, and is by her persuaded to offer sacrifice to the goddess Ashtoreth. God in his anger allows a storm of misfortune to burst over

his head : the prophet Nathan predicts war, destruction, and misery as an atonement for his crime. "In this tragedy," says Vondel, "no blood is shed, but a great soul dies."

It is through the influence of his time that this truly tragical situation has to a great extent been lost in the treatment. I have premised in my general statement of the tragic principle, that a historical character must be presented according to the requirements of the action, not primarily according to historical truth. Now Vondel's audience was, in the first place, well versed in biblical history and, in the second place, too inartistic to allow any tampering with it. Vondel represents Solomon, therefore, as a gray-haired old man, and this venerable personage falls desperately in love with an unscrupulous, designing woman, who simply winds him around her little finger. The situation, through this treatment, begins to belong to comedy, instead of tragedy. The tragic principle would have been preserved if Vondel had felt at liberty to present Solomon as a victorious king in the flower and vigor of manhood. Then his passion for Sidonia would have been free from the suggestion of ridicule that now attaches to it, and would, on account of the contrast in character between Solomon and Sidonia, have been burdened with fateful forebodings from the point of view of the spectator. These forebodings would have developed into true tragical fear when Solomon, whipped on by his pride and Sidonia's allurements, forsakes the path of Truth and turns against God. The spectator would have pitied him in his consequent loss of peace and the wretched suffering which his conscience inflicts upon him. And when he is finally crushed by Nathan's prophecy of destruction, the spectator's emotions would have resolved themselves into the resigned conviction that after all Truth conquered.

Vondel's *Lucifer* has been the subject of widespread discussion, and is better known outside of Holland than any

of his other tragedies. There exist two English translations of the play.<sup>1</sup> Alberdink Thym declares in his *Portraits of Joost van den Vondel* that the poet here crowns himself as the Prince of Dutch Tragedy. By way of contrast with this statement, it is significant to note that the play was barred from the stage after two performances. Do Alberdink Thym and so many other admirers think that the first object of a tragedy is to be read? Certainly, as in all Vondelian plays, there are in *Lucifer* many details beautiful in thought and in expression. But how about the play as a whole? That is the question.

It is now beyond cavil that *Lucifer* is a political allegory. It represents the revolt of the Netherlands (the fallen angels) under the leadership of William the Silent (Lucifer) from the dominion of the king of Spain (God). The Spaniards represent mankind and are typified by Cardinal Granvella (Adam). Vondel intends here to present his, *i. e.*, the Roman Catholic, point of view concerning the Revolt.

The plot deals with Satan's hatred of mankind, his revolt from God's rule, and his consequent expulsion from heaven with all his diabolical accomplices. Who would deny that we have here excellent material for a tragical situation? Lucifer or Satan, too, with his one-sided passion against mankind and his hopeless attitude of defiance toward God, is truly a tragical character.

It is at once evident, however, that the placing of the action in heaven has its serious drawbacks. The human interest becomes indirect. God, an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, never changing being, is no dramatic character, because a clash of his will with any other will is for the spectator out of the question. Since Vondel is compelled to insist on such a clash, we cannot have a consistent develop-

<sup>1</sup> One by George Santayana, the other by Van Noppen.

ment of God's character. Moreover, the historical facts before Vondel's mind, the success, namely, of the Dutch revolt and the consequent decline of Spain, lead him, after the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven (which should end the tragedy) to show how Lucifer nevertheless encompasses the fall of man. Lucifer, therefore, conquers God. Leaving out of consideration that this course is out of keeping with all idea of God, it completely ruins the tragical situation, for it makes the atonement, the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven, ineffective. It also entails inconsistency in the development of Lucifer's character: though he cannot conquer God, still he does. The dual nature of allegory wrecks the tragedy.

We have followed Vondel's career as a dramatist in its rise: it is not necessary to give a detailed analysis of its decline. *Salomoneus* was written in order to use again the costly stage-heaven built for *Lucifer*, so that the expense of its construction might be covered. *Jephthah* is an example of how a tragedy may be faultless in conventional form and still be written without the genius which rediscovers for itself the essential principles of the structure of tragedy. In *David in Exile* and *David Restored* Vondel returns to his earlier manner of dialogued narration. In *Samson* there is no tragical situation. Vondel's faithfulness to the local color of biblical history spoils *Adonijah*. *The Batavian Brothers* is a dramatic poem. *Phaethon* was another attempt to use the heaven of *Lucifer*. Though the personality of Eve in *Adam in Exile* is developed with great power, the play itself shows to what lengths the faultiness of Vondel's dramatic conception could go. *Zungchin* could not well be weaker as a tragedy, and *Noah* is a return to the poet's earlier manner of edification.

The great art of drama-building was for Vondel subordinate to what he, Vondel, wished to convey by means of it:

the contents were to him more important than the form. The construction of tragedy, which, besides the skill imparted only by a thorough experience of the stage, demands all the intuition and foresight of genius, he considered as something that could be learned from Aristotle, Scaliger, and Heinsius. The contents, and they include a deal of material foreign to the tragedy in hand, as well as to tragedy in general, alone got the benefit of his genius. In them he expressed himself, through them he gave vent to his moods of poetic indignation, sorrow, despair, hope, cheer, and joy. The spirit of these moods caused his expression to assume automatically the lyrical form. The dramatic form was grafted upon the lyrical and the result is a compromise: Vondel's tragedies are mostly *epical* successions of image groups and scenes, which together represent a story.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that these so-called tragedies contain countless beauties of detail which for the *reader* will continue to have interest and charm. For the *spectator*, who sits at a distance in order to observe better, they lack the wholeness of effect which he has come to see. His ears are only accessory to his eyes. Words as an accompaniment to the action, as a spontaneous expression of it, or as acts in themselves, the spectator needs. But when their object is edification, propaganda, philosophical or oratorical effect, his dramatic pleasure is hopelessly marred. A tragedy is a structure of infinite compositeness which nevertheless presents a united front of grandeur and simplicity. Such construction requires objective, not lyrical, imagination. It demands a sacrifice of personal predilections, prejudices, and the like, a complete sinking of one's personality into the demands of the art. Of this Vondel was absolutely incapable. Indifferent to nothing that passed or met him, he took too active a share

<sup>1</sup> This is why Milton could make use of Vondel's tragedies.

in the stirring occurrences of his time to devote his great poetic powers to the development of an artistic combination for its own sake. He must say something, do something, oppose this, advance that. His choosing the form of tragedy for the expression of this polemical attitude of mind shows that he mistook the nature of tragedy. An analysis of his plays from the dramatic point of view proves, moreover, that his conception of its principles and its structure was in the main erroneous and inadequate, and that, the weighty opinion of many critics to the contrary notwithstanding, he was not a dramatic genius.

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